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## U.S. companies are picky about investing in China. The exceptions? Burgers and lattes

By AAMER MADHANI, PAUL WISEMAN and ELAINE KURTENBACH  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — There's been no shortage of tough news for China's economy as some of the world's biggest brands consider or take action to shift manufacturing to friendlier shores at a time of unease about security controls, protectionism and wobbly relations between Beijing and Washington. Count Adidas, Apple and Samsung among those looking elsewhere. But as a tumultuous 2023 for the Chinese economy comes to a close, there has been at least one bright spot for Beijing when it comes to foreign investment: American fast-food chains have decided a market of 1.4 billion people is simply too delicious to pass up. KFC China's parent company opened its 10,000th restaurant in China this month and aims to have stores within reach of half of China's population by 2026. McDonald's is planning to open 3,500 new stores in China over the next four years.



Continued on Page 2 **A man carries his take way McDonald's foods as people take order at a machine at a newly opened McDonald's restaurant on Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023.**

Associated Press

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# U.S. companies are picky about investing in China. The exceptions? Burgers and lattes

Continued from Front

And Starbucks invested \$220 million in a manufacturing and distribution facility in eastern China, its biggest project outside the U.S.

This is surely not what Chinese President Xi Jinping had in mind as he made the case to American CEOs about the upside of China's "super-large market" last month while he was in San Francisco for a summit of world leaders. The investments in fast food and other consumer goods, while Washington is curbing exports of computer chips and other advanced technology, don't fit into China's own blueprint for modernizing its economy. "As you try to interpret the signals from McDonald's and Starbucks" and other chains, says Phil Levy, chief economist at the supply chain management firm Flexport, "note what the industries are: These are not high-tech burgers."

And while some U.S. companies are increasing investments in the world's second-largest economy, overall foreign investment began falling this year. In the July-September quarter, net foreign direct investment in China sank to a deficit of \$11.8 billion, the first quarterly deficit since Beijing began publishing the data in 1998. As tensions simmer between China and its Western trading partners, many multinational companies are shifting investments to other places, such as Southeast Asia or India, or repatriating their earnings. That has sapped China of a key engine when its economy has yet to fully recover from the disruptions of the pandemic and a property industry crisis that has been a drag on growth.

Beijing puts some of the blame on U.S. government policies. Commerce Ministry spokesperson Shu Jueting said recently, "The U.S. side has repeatedly politicized economic, trade and technology issues and overstretched the concept of security, abused export control measures, and restricted trade and investment in China by its own enterprises, which is forcing enterprises to give up opportunities in the Chinese market



**Shopper stand watch as people visit an Apple Store at an outdoor shopping mall in Beijing on Saturday, Dec. 23, 2023.**

and opportunities for win-win cooperation."

A survey released in September by the U.S.-China Business Council, which represents American companies in China, suggested that the uncertainty has taken a toll: 43% of its members said China's business environment had deteriorated in the past year, and 83% said they were less optimistic about China than they had been three years ago. Twenty-one percent said they were investing fewer resources in China, versus just 10% who were investing more.

Surveys of European and Japanese companies have shown similar results.

While China's market is gigantic, it's ailing. Unemployment among young Chinese rose to over 20% by June, the last time the government released that data. Housing prices are falling and the stock market is down nearly 15% since the summer. That's left many Chinese feeling nervous about spending.

Still, bullishness for China as other industries try to de-risk and detangle from Beijing may be a profit-increasing strategy for the fast-food industry.

"We believe there is no better time to simplify our structure, given the tremendous opportunity to capture increased demand and further benefit from our fastest-growing mar-

ket's long-term potential," McDonald's CEO Chris Kempczinski said as the Chicago-based company announced in November it was increasing its minority 20% ownership of its McDonald's licensed stores in China, Macau and Hong Kong to 48%.

Burgers and lattes don't raise the sorts of friction that more high-tech industries have in the complicated U.S.-China relationship. Those strains have persisted under the presidency of Joe Biden, who took office vowing to do more to counter China's expanding military clout and its menacing of neighbors, to improve the country's treatment of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities, and to crack down on intellectual property theft.

Relations hit a low point in February when Biden ordered a Chinese spy balloon that traversed the continental United States to be shot down. Beijing, which claims self-governed Taiwan as its own territory, also protested a stopover in the U.S. by the island's president, Tsai Ing-wen, earlier this year. China answered fresh U.S. controls on exports of advanced computer chips and the technology to make them with limits of its own on exports of vital commodities like graphite, gallium and germanium, all metals used in making semiconductors, solar panels, missiles and radar.

The relationship appears to be stabilizing somewhat as 2023 winds down, highlighted by last month's Biden and Xi meeting outside San Francisco. But since then, Biden's top advisers have said there are no plans to shift the strategy of tightening regulations and blocking U.S.-based high-tech investments in China, citing the need to safeguard national security.

Both former President Donald Trump, the 2024 GOP presidential front-runner, and Biden have worried about depending on China, a potential adversary, for supplies of critical materials used in many high-tech products. Both have sought to reduce America's reliance on Chinese factories and have encouraged companies to shift away from China to other countries — so-called "friend-shoring."

Still, Biden administration officials have said they don't want to see a total decoupling of the world's two biggest economies.

"De-risking, yes. Decoupling, no," Nicholas Burns, the U.S. ambassador to China, said at a recent event in Washington. "We want to continue a major trade and investment relationship with China, just not ... in the realm that might help them leapfrog over us sometime in the next 10 years in military technology."

Rosemary Coates, executive director of the nonprofit Re-

shoring Institute, noted that decisions to expand or re-trench are relatively easy for a company like McDonald's or its fast-food rivals.

China's vast market is vital for many foreign companies: At their annual investors day gathering this month, McDonald's executives noted that 70 million of the 150 million customers active in its customer loyalty program are in China.

KFC China says growth in its new outlets has averaged more than 22% over the last five years, and it plans to open 1,200 additional stores in the next three years. The chain Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen relaunched its brand in China in August with a flagship restaurant in Shanghai and plans to open 1,700 stores over the next 10 years.

But for all the promise of China's huge market, U.S. businesses have other reasons to think twice about expanding in China.

In July, the U.S. recommended Americans reconsider traveling to China because of arbitrary law enforcement and exit bans and the risk of wrongful detentions. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo has warned Chinese leaders that U.S. businesses might stop investing in their country if they do not address complaints about worsening conditions due to raids on firms, unexplained fines and unpredictable official behavior.

While insisting that China is keen to have foreign investment, Beijing has given no indication it might change trade, market access and other policies that irk Washington and its other trading partners.

"Where do you draw the line?" asked Levy, a former White House economic adviser in George W. Bush's administration. "Someone might say: For sourcing sensitive computer chips, this has to be done in a place I really trust. ... The other extreme is: We're OK selling them lattes and burgers. But where do you draw the line for the stuff in between — say, automotive parts? What about ball bearings?" □

Associated Press

# Independent lawyers begin prosecuting cases of sexual assault and other crimes in the U.S. military

By **LOLITA C. BALDOR**  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The U.S. military on Thursday opened a new chapter in how it investigates and prosecutes cases of sexual assault and other major crimes, putting independent lawyers in charge of those decisions and sidelining commanders after years of pressure from Congress.

The change, long resisted by Pentagon leaders, was finally forced by frustrated members of Congress who believed that too often commanders would fail to take victims' complaints seriously or would try to protect alleged perpetrators in their units.

The new law was fueled by a persistent increase in sexual assaults and harassment across the military. The Air Force, the Marine Corps and the Navy all saw reported sexual assaults go up last year, but a sharp 9% drop in reports from the Army the largest military service drove the overall number down. In 2021, reported assaults spiked by 13%.

Under the law, new special counsels will have the authority to make prosecution decisions on a number of major crimes, including murder, rape and several



In this May 1, 2014 file photo, Nate Galbreath, Senior Executive Adviser for the Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), leaves a news conference at the Pentagon.

other sexual assault-related offenses, kidnapping, domestic violence, making or possessing child sexual abuse images, stalking and retaliation.

In a statement, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III called it "the most important reform to our military justice system since the creation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice in 1950." It's unclear, however, what

impact the change will have on the broader problem of sexual misconduct in the military, including if it will trigger an increase in prosecutions and, if so, whether that will have any deterrent effect.

Senior officials from the military services who are familiar with the new program said they already have more than 160 certified special trial coun-

sels who will take over the prosecution decisions as of Thursday. Many of those lawyers, however, have already been involved, providing advice and support for months on cases that are underway.

The officials spoke to reporters on the condition of anonymity to discuss the new program under rules set by the Defense Department.

As of Thursday, the special trial counsels will have sole authority to make prosecution decisions on new cases involving the major crimes. Any advice on already existing cases is nonbinding, the officials said.

According to the officials, the Army will have 65 certified trial counsels, the Air Force will have 40, the Marine Corps will have 33 and the Navy will have 24, with 23 attorneys who are not yet certified assisting in the cases. About 10 more are expected to be certified in the summer.

The lawyers will be scattered around the U.S. and the world, with larger numbers at bases and locations where there are more service members and more crime.

The officials said they expect each trial counsel to handle as many as 50 investigations and roughly eight to 12 trials a year.

An independent commission that studied sexual assaults in the military suggested in its report that the use of special counsels would have a positive impact.

It said the special counsels would make better decisions on what cases should go forward, resulting in higher conviction rates. □

Associated Press

# World population up 75 million this year, topping 8 billion by Jan. 1

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**  
Associated Press

The world population grew by 75 million people over the past year and on New Year's Day it will stand at more than 8 billion people, according to figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau on Thursday.

The worldwide growth rate in the past year was just under 1%. At the start of 2024, 4.3 births and two deaths are expected worldwide every second, according to the Census Bureau figures.

The growth rate for the United States in the past year was 0.53%, about half the

worldwide figure. The U.S. added 1.7 million people and will have a population on New Year's Day of 335.8 million people.

If the current pace continues through the end of the decade, the 2020s could be the slowest-growing decade in U.S. history, yielding a growth rate of less than 4% over the 10-year-period from 2020 to 2030, said William Frey, a demographer at The Brookings Institution. The slowest-growing decade currently was in the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, when the growth rate was 7.3%. "Of course growth may

tick up a bit as we leave the pandemic years. But it would still be difficult to get to 7.3%," Frey said.

At the start of 2024, the United States is expected to experience one birth every nine seconds and one death every 9.5 seconds. However, immigration will keep the population from dropping. Net international migration is expected to add one person to the U.S. population every 28.3 seconds. This combination of births, deaths and net international migration will increase the U.S. population by one person every 24.2 seconds. □



People look up at Christmas lights as crowds stroll around downtown Lisbon's Chiado neighborhood, Saturday evening, Dec. 23, 2023.

Associated Press

# Wisconsin university chancellor says he was fired for producing and appearing in porn videos

**MADISON, Wis. (AP)** — Former University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Chancellor Joe Gow said Thursday that the school's governing board fired him because members were uncomfortable with him and his wife producing and appearing in pornographic videos. The Universities of Wisconsin Board of Regents, which oversees UW-Madison, UW-La Crosse and 11 other regional campuses, voted unanimously during a hastily convened closed meeting Wednesday evening to fire Gow.

After the vote, Universities of Wisconsin President Jay Rothman and regents President Karen Walsh issued statements saying the regents had learned of specific conduct by Gow that subjected the university to "significant reputational harm." Rothman called Gow's actions "abhorrent" and Walsh said she was "disgusted." But neither of them offered any details of the allegations.

Gow told The Associated Press in a phone interview Thursday morning that regents had discovered that he and his wife, former UW-La Crosse professor Carmen Wilson, had been producing and appearing in pornographic videos. He maintained that he



This undated photo provided by University of Wisconsin system shows UW-La Crosse Chancellor Joe Gow.

never mentioned UW-La Crosse or his role at the university in any of the videos and the firing violated his free speech rights.

"My wife and I live in a country where we have a First Amendment," he said. "We're dealing with consensual adult sexuality. The regents are overreacting. They're certainly not adhering to their own commitment to free speech or the First Amendment."

Gow also complained that the regents never told him what policy he violated

and he was never given a hearing or other opportunity to present his case. He said he's contemplating a lawsuit.

"I got an email last night saying I was terminated," Gow said. "I wish I would have had the opportunity to have a hearing. When reasonable people understand what my wife and I are creating, it calms them down."

Gow had planned to retire as chancellor at the conclusion of the spring 2024 semester and transition

into a role teaching communication courses. But Rothman said Wednesday evening that he planned to file a complaint with UW-La Crosse's interim chancellor, Betsy Morgan, seeking a review of Gow's tenure.

Rothman said in an email to the AP on Thursday morning that Gow failed to act as a role model for students, faculty and the community and mistakenly believes the First Amendment equates to a "free pass to say or do anything that he pleases."

"Good judgement requires that there are and must be limits on what is said or done by the individuals entrusted to lead our universities," Rothman wrote.

Rothman added that Gow served at the pleasure of the regents and was not entitled to any specific process. "That should be abundantly clear to him," Rothman said.

Gow took heavy criticism in 2018 for inviting porn actor Nina Hartley to speak at UW-La Crosse. He paid her \$5,000 out of student fees to appear. Ray Cross, then UW system president, reprimanded him and the regents refused to give him a raise that year. Gow said then that he was exercising the system's free speech policies.

Gow and his wife star in a YouTube channel called "Sexy Healthy Cooking" in which the couple cooks meals with porn actors. They also have written two e-books, "Monogamy with Benefits: How Porn Enriches Our Relationship" and "Married with Benefits — Our Real-Life Adult Industry Adventures" under pseudonyms. Their biographies on Amazon contain links to their videos on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, and a pornographic website. □

Associated Press



New York City Mayor Eric Adams speaks during a news conference, Dec. 12, 2023, in New York.

Associated Press

By **SOPHIA TARENEN**  
Associated Press

**CHICAGO (AP)** — The mayors of Chicago, New York City and Denver renewed pleas Wednesday for more federal

help and coordination with Texas over the growing number of asylum-seekers arriving in their cities by bus and plane.

The mayors' requests come

## Democratic mayors renew pleas for federal help and coordination with Texas over migrant crisis

as U.S. cities have struggled to manage the increasing number of migrants sent from Texas and other states. Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's busing operation has transported more than 80,000 migrants to Democratic-led cities since last year. His administration recently stepped up the practice with chartered planes.

The mayors sharply criticized Abbott and the effort, saying buses arrive at all hours and outside designated drop-off zones with no details on who

is aboard.

"We cannot allow buses with people needing our help to arrive without warning at any hour of day and night," New York City Mayor Eric Adams said at a virtual news conference with the other mayors. "This not only prevents us from providing assistance in an orderly way, it puts those who have already suffered in so much in danger."

Chicago has cracked down on so-called "rogue" buses, with lawsuits, fines and tickets. In recent weeks, buses have

tried to avoid penalties by making unscheduled drop-offs in the suburbs, forcing local officials and authorities to step in. Recently, one bus unloaded migrants overnight at a gas station in Kankakee, roughly 70 miles (110 kilometers) from Chicago.

"The lack of care that has been on display for the last year and a half has created an incredible amount of chaos," said Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson. More than 26,000 migrants have arrived in the city since last year. □

## Mexican officials clear border camp as U.S. pressure mounts to limit migrant crossings

By VALERIE GONZALEZ

Associated Press

MATAMOROS, Mexico

(AP) — A ragged migrant tent camp next to the Rio Grande is a long way from Mexico's National Palace, where a U.S. delegation met this week with Mexico's president seeking more action to curb a surge of migrants reaching the U.S. border.

But as Mexican officials in the city of Matamoros dispatched heavy machinery to clear out what they claimed were abandoned tents at the camp, the action was a likely sign of things to come.

The United States has given clear signs, including temporarily closing key border rail crossings into Texas, that it wants Mexico to do more to stop migrants hopping freight cars, buses and trucks to the border.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said he got a worried phone call on Dec. 20 from U.S. President Joe Biden.

"He asked, Joe Biden asked to speak with me, he was worried about the situation on the border because of the unprecedented number of migrants arriving at the border," López Obrador said Thursday. "He called me, saying we had



Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, center, meets with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, top left, partially covered, and his Secretary of Foreign Relations Alicia Barcena, top right, at the National Palace, the office and residence of the president, in Mexico City, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023.

to look for a solution together."

Mexico, desperate to get the border crossings reopened to its manufactured goods, started to give indications it would crack down a bit. López Obrador said Thursday that Mexico detained more migrants in the week leading up to Christmas than the United States did, with Mexican detentions rising from about 8,000 per day

on Dec. 16 to about 9,500 on Dec. 25.

That increased effort appeared to be on display in Matamoros Wednesday as U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken held talks with López Obrador in Mexico City. Migrants set up the encampment across from Brownsville, Texas in late 2022. It once held as many as 1,500 migrants, but many tents were vacated in recent months as people

waded across the river to reach the United States.

"What we are doing is removing any tents that we see are empty," Segismundo Doguín, the head of the local office of Mexico's immigration agency, said. But one Honduran who would give only his first name, José, claimed that some of the 200 remaining migrants were practically forced to leave the camp when the clearance oper-

ation began late Tuesday. "They ran us out," he said, explaining that campers were given short notice to move their tents and belongings and felt intimidated by the heavy machinery. "You had to run for your life to avoid an accident."

Some migrants moved into a fenced-in area of the encampment where immigration officers said they could relocate, but fear remained. About 70 migrants flung themselves into the river Tuesday night and crossed into the U.S. They were trapped for hours along the riverbank beneath the layers of concertina wire set up on order of the Texas governor.

Few options exist for the migrants who were asked to leave the encampment, said Gladys Cañas, founder of a Matamoros-based nongovernmental group, Ayudandoles a Triunfar, or Helping Them Win.

"The truth is that the shelters are saturated," Cañas said. She was working at the encampment Wednesday afternoon, encouraging migrants to avoid crossing illegally into the U.S., especially after several drowned in the last few days while attempting to swim the river. □

Associated Press

## More than 40 dead in Liberia after leaking fuel tanker exploded as people tried to collect gas

By MARK N. MENGONFIA

Associated Press

MONROVIA, Liberia (AP) — A leaking fuel tanker exploded earlier this week as people gathered to collect the gasoline, leaving more than 40 dead, authorities in Liberia said Thursday.

The blast on Tuesday also injured at least 83 people in the town of Totota in the central part of the West African country, health officials said.

Many of the dead were buried in a mass grave on Wednesday because their remains were unrecognizable, said health official Dr. Cynthia Blapook in Bong County. Health authorities said an exact death toll was difficult to confirm because of how badly the bodies were burned.

Liberian Vice President Jewel Howard-Taylor attended the mass funeral.

"We never expected to start the new year like this," Howard-Taylor said.

Health officials said the number of injured could rise as they were not certain everyone had been brought in for care. A doctor at one hospital treating the injured urged the Liberian government to deploy a disaster management team and to have one in each county to respond to emergencies. Dr. Minnie Sankawolo-Rocks also pleaded with people not to approach fuel tankers in the hope of collecting much-needed gasoline. Similar deadly accidents have occurred elsewhere in Africa. □



In this photo provided by the Liberia National Red Cross Society, health workers from the Liberia National Red Cross Society and the Bong County Health Team move the bodies of victims of a tanker explosion in Totota, Liberia, Tuesday Dec. 26, 2023.

Associated Press

## South Korea's top court orders a 3rd Japanese company to compensate workers for forced labor

By **JIWON SONG**  
Associated Press

**SEOUL, South Korea (AP)**

— South Korea's top court on Thursday ordered a third Japanese company to compensate some of its former wartime Korean employees for forced labor, the second such ruling in a week.

The South Korean verdict drew quick rebukes from Japan, but observers say it's unlikely the ruling will cause any major negative impacts on bilateral relations, as both governments are serious about improving their cooperation in the face of shared challenges like North Korea's nuclear program and China's assertiveness.

The Supreme Court ruled that shipbuilder Hitachi Zosen Corp. and heavy equipment manufacturer Mitsubishi Heavy Industries must give between 50 million won (about \$39,000) and 150 million won (about \$116,000) in compensation to each of the 17 Korean plaintiffs — one of whom is a surviving ex-worker and the rest bereaved relatives.



**Family members of victims react outside the Supreme Court of Korea in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023.**

Mitsubishi and another Japanese company, Nippon Steel, were previously given a similar compensation order by the South Korean court, but it was the first such ruling for Hitachi.

Among the plaintiffs are the surviving victim who suffered a serious burn and the bereaved family of a worker who died during an earthquake in Japan in

1944, when they worked for Mitsubishi's aircraft-making factory in Nagoya. Others include the relatives of late Mitsubishi workers who were injured during the U.S. atomic bombing of Hiroshima and another wartime event, according to a court press release.

A ruling in favor of Korean plaintiffs was widely expected because the Supreme

Court in two separate rulings in 2018 ordered Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel to compensate some of their former Korean employees, saying they were forced to provide their labors to the companies when the Korean Peninsula was colonized by Japan from 1910-45. On Dec. 21, the top court again ordered Mitsubishi and Nippon Steel

to provide compensation to other Koreans for similar colonial-era forced labor.

Japan's Foreign Ministry responded by summoning a senior South Korean diplomat in Japan to lodge a formal protest. In the meeting, Hiroyuki Namazu, director-general for the Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, called the latest South Korean ruling "extremely regrettable and absolutely unacceptable," according to the Japanese ministry.

Namazu maintained Japan's long-held position that all compensation issues between the two countries were settled when they normalized ties in 1965. The South Korean rulings in 2018 and this month argued that the treaty can't prevent individuals from seeking compensation for forced labor because Japanese companies' use of such laborers were "acts of illegality against humanity" that were linked to Tokyo's illegal colonial occupation and its war of aggression. □

**Associated Press**

## More Ukrainian children from Ukraine's Russia-held regions arrive in Belarus despite global outrage

By **YURAS KARMANAU**  
Associated Press

**TALLINN, Estonia (AP)** — Belarus' authoritarian president on Thursday attended

a government-organized meeting with children brought from Russia-controlled areas of Ukraine, openly defying an inter-

national outrage over his country's involvement in Moscow's deportation of Ukrainian children.

Speaking at the event marking the arrival of a new group of Ukrainian children ahead of the New Year holiday, President Alexander Lukashenko vowed to "embrace these children, bring them to our home, keep them warm and make their childhood happier."

Belarusian officials did not say how many Ukrainian children were brought into the country.

A recent study by Yale University has found that more than 2,400 Ukrainian children aged 6-17 have been brought to Belarus from four Ukrainian regions that have been partially occupied by

Russian forces.

The Belarusian opposition has urged the International Criminal Court to hold Lukashenko and his officials accountable for their involvement in the illegal transfer of Ukrainian children.

Pavel Latushka, a former Belarusian culture minister turned opposition activist who has presented the ICC with evidence of Lukashenko's alleged involvement in the unlawful deportation of the children, said the arrival of a new group from Russia-occupied territories "underlines the need for the ICC to investigate those crimes."

"Lukashenko, his family members and associates together with the Kremlin

have organized a system of transfer of Ukrainian children, including orphans, from the occupied territories to Belarus, and this channel is still working," Latushka told The Associated Press.

In March, the ICC issued arrest warrants for both Russian President Vladimir Putin and his children's rights commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, accusing them of the war crimes of unlawful deportation of children and unlawful transfer of children from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. Moscow has rejected the allegations. □



**Belarus' President Alexander Lukashenko, left, and Russian President Vladimir Putin pose for a photo prior to a session of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in Minsk, Belarus, Thursday, Nov. 23, 2023.**

**Associated Press**

## Aruban legends: Frenchman's Pass

(Oranjestad)—If you ever plan on taking a group tour of the island, you may pass through the Frenchman's Pass in Balashi. The Frenchman's pass (known to locals as "Fransé Pas") remains a mysterious—and spooky—road of which its legend is told from generation to generation.

The history of the Frenchman's pass—and how it got its name—dates back to the colonization era, when the French tried to colonize the island, but were met with an angry mob of indigenous settlers, refusing to give up their land. However, as the French were heavily equipped with fire arms, the indigenous settlers began to retreat, and hid away in nearby caves. The French colonizers tried to smoke them out of the caves, but the indigenous settlers ended up inhaling too much smoke and most died in those caves. From then on, this passage was known as Frenchman's Pass, and there have been many accounts of spirits roaming

the area of Spanish Lagoon.

There are many ghost stories surrounding this area, but one of the most famous one involves a lonely hitchhiker, trying to find a ride back home in the dark rainy night.

Sometime after trying to hitchhike, the man saw a car approaching, appearing almost ghost-like in the rain. However, since he needed a ride real bad, he didn't think twice and jumped in. But to his horror, he noticed that there was no driver in the front. Paralyzed with fear, he didn't dare to get out, and the car started to move.

When approaching a sharp turn, the hitch hiker braced for impact, but just when he thought the car might drive straight off the road and crash, he saw a hand appear out the window and turn the wheel. For the next few turns, the hand appeared again. After having had enough, the man decided to jump out and he ran to Santa



Cruz.

Arriving at a nearby bar, he ordered a drink and began to tell everyone about his experience. Everyone grew quiet, because they realized he wasn't some drunk messing around; he was telling the truth.

Sometime later, two men walked into the bar and one of them noticed the hitchhiker. He called out to his buddy and said: "Look,

there's the idiot who sat in our car when we were pushing it!"

French man's pass is one of the few sites on the island that keeps the locals on their toes. While most ghost stories may not have real grounds—or some may even be a set up story for a joke, this pass contributes a lot to our culture of folkloric story-telling. □

Source: [visitaruba.com](http://visitaruba.com)

## Aruba's Bocas: home to the rarest fossil reefs on the planet!

(Oranjestad)—If you've been to the northern coast of Aruba already, you've probably noticed how the ground differs entirely from the sandy beaches on the southern part of the island. These hard surfaces, with sharp bumps and holes are actually fossilized coral reefs, of which its growth and changes can be traced back to the last glacial period.

On May 30 2023, geoscientists, Dr. Patrick Boyden from the Marum research faculty at the University of

Bremen, Prof. dr. Alessio Rovere from the Ca' Foscari University of Venice and Prof. dr. Gianfranco Scicchitano, from the University of Bari Aldo Moro, presented their research on these fossilized coral reefs at the University of Aruba. Their focus for their research included studying the health and formation patterns of these coral reefs, and to investigate how these reefs have responded and can respond to fluctuating sea levels or extreme weather, like hurricanes and tsunamis.



Through underwater and land surveillance, and 3D models of the reefs, they were able to narrow down when these formations started to take place. They were also able to track the fluctuation of sea levels during the past hundred or even thousands of years, and the effects that this fluctuation has had on the coral reefs of the windward side of Aruba.

These findings can certainly

put things into perspective. The ground on which we have walked many times in the northern part of the island hold such rich history, history that dates back to a time that most of us cannot even imagine. As the scientists themselves have pointed out, these fossilized reefs on the windward side are truly an incredible and rare remnant of geological history, as they provide a clear view of how these reefs have formed.

This research is also important for the future of coral reefs on the island. By studying rising sea levels and climate impact on these coral reefs, we are able to take concrete action in protecting and preserving our coral reefs. So, if you are ever visiting one of the bocas or driving along the northern part of the island, please be conscious to help protect our natural historical remnant. Oh, and wear (coral-friendly) sunscreen! □

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## Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

**SAN NICOLAS—** At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the

island.

### Flow of history

if you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community Museum and the Carnival Euphoria, all within walking distance from one another. The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is

remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaux of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barber-shop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment. Carnival Euphoria is showcasing Aruba's Carnival. See how are Carnival has developed over the past 65 years.

### The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a

place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down

buildings with colorful art pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

### Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you name it. Arts & crafts by Cosecha store & Creative Center, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and locally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □



## Fireworks and Pets

- Keep your pet at a distance from fireworks, and never launch them in the direction of your pet.
- Ensure your pet remains calm by maintaining a sense of normalcy and calm. If your pet seeks attention or companionship, provide it. If your pet prefers a quieter environment, accommodate that preference. Never penalize your pet for displaying fear!
- Take measures such as closing curtains, leaving lights on, and shutting blinds and doors to create a secure space. Amplifying the volume of the TV or radio can help drown out external noises.
- Ensure your pet is microchipped, facilitating easier identification and return if it strays due to loud noises.
- Consider providing them with a calming pill, available from a veterinarian or pet store, ensuring your pet stays in a secure area within the house, like a bathroom or a quiet room.



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Aruba Tourism Authority honors loyal visitors at Playa Linda Beach Resort!

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing Goodwill Ambassadors and an Emerald Ambassador of Aruba. These Ambassadors were respectively honored with certificates acknowledging their years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

The three honoring levels are as follows:

- Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
- Goodwill Ambassador (20>years consecutively visiting Aruba)
- Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

consecutively visiting Aruba)

The honorees were:

Goodwill Ambassadors  
Mr. Bruce & Mrs. Ellen Levy from New Jersey, United States.

Emerald Ambassador  
Mrs. Ann Johnston from New York, United States.

Ms. Marouska Heyliger representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Playa Linda Beach Resort bestowed the certificates to the honorees, presented them with gifts, and also thanked them for choosing Aruba as their favorite vacation destination, as their home away from home.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by Mrs. & Mrs. Levy were:

- Aruba's friendly people.



- Aruba's beautiful beaches.
- Aruba nice sunny weather.
- Aruba's great food.
- Aruba's safety.

Top reasons for returning to Aruba, provided by Mrs. Johnston were:

- Aruba's year-round sunny weather.
- Aruba's nice sandy beaches.
- Aruba's warm and friendly

- people.
- "Aruba is my home away from home."
- "Friends I have made over the years."

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honorees for their continued visits to the "One Happy Island".

The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins and its history

(Oranjestad)—The Bushiribana Gold Mill Ruins is one of the most visited places by tourists on the island, as it lies along the northern coast line near the mini pool and on the way to the Natural Bridge. Despite its seemingly plain appearance, this ruin represents one of the most important histories of the island: The Aruban Gold Rush.

Built in 1872 by English company Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd, the gold mill at Bushiribana was constructed in the area where most gold was found by locals. The story of gold on Aruba actually dates back to 1725, when a first exploration for gold on the island was commis-

sioned by the Dutch West India Company. Under the leadership of Mr. Paulus Printz, a three-year search was conducted on Aruba, to no avail. Though they found some gold, it was enough to motivate a further search, and the assignment was discontinued by Printz himself.

It wasn't until 100 years later, in 1824, when a young boy found a lump of gold while out herding his father's sheep. His father took it to a local merchant who then sold the lump for \$70. Unbeknownst to the boy and his father, they quite literally struck gold, and as word got out, a gold fever spread among the locals who started search-

ing for more gold. About 25 pounds worth was found.

At the same time, the Aruban government took immediate actions, and informed Curacao that gold was found. At first, everyone could look for gold, as long as they sold it to the government. However, after some time, the government decided to implement stricter rules and banned local search parties.

Over the years, concession-holding had seen different companies from around the world, all of which used primitive methods to dig and carve out gold from the rocks. Aruba Island Gold Mining Company Ltd.

was no different, but used a unique method that involved grinding the rocks and letting the dust be blown away by the strong northeast wind, leaving clumps of gold behind. The next step was melting the gold and letting it attach to quicksilver in order to obtain pure gold. All these processes were done at

the Bushiribana Gold Mill.

The gold mill itself had a short life-span: only 10 years in service, but its structure remained relatively solid till this day, and is now a historical remnant.

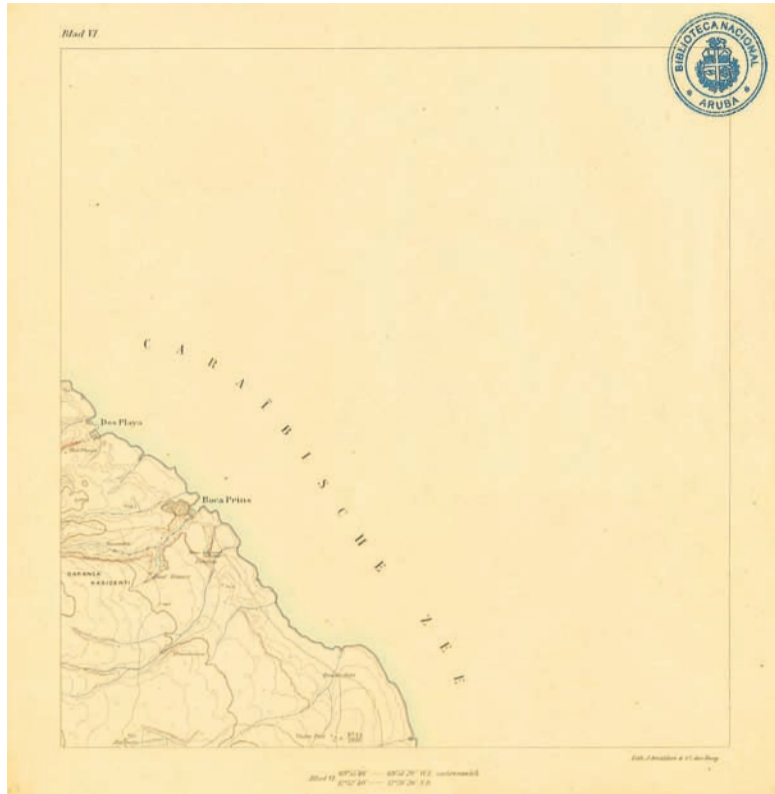
Sources: Etnia Nativa & gold-mineranch.com.

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# Aruba: the legend behind its name



**(Oranjestad)—Most folkloric tales and legends in Aruba revolve around our indigenous ancestors, who came from mainland Venezuela, and discovered the island and made it into their new home. This particular legend tells the story of the birth of the Aruba name.**

The legend follows the life of Arua, an indigenous Cacique originally from Aroa in the Falcon state in Venezuela in the year 50 AD. Arua had a son around the year 70 AD with his wife Shira, who they named Corobori. When Corobori was old enough, he joined his father on the usual boat trip to the islands of Curacao and Bonaire to gather salt.

On their way back to Mainland Venezuela, they were caught up in a heavy rain storm—a side effect from a passing, but far away, hurricane. Of course, because of the lack of motors and sail, their boat was left in the mercy of the heavy winds. After a while, the storm started to pass, and the clouds began to clear up. Finally able to see around them, the Cacique spotted land approximately an hour away. So, they started to row in that direction until they reached the coast.

Once they arrived on what they thought was Venezuela, they decided to stay the night and fix their kayak. The next morning, the Cacique ordered his son and a few warriors to go find any sign of population in the area: "Corobori," Arua said. "Don't come back without news. It's in your hands how long we stay here till we find our family. So, if you need to take a week to gather information, we will wait for you."

"Don't worry," Corobori replied. "As soon as we have any information, we will let you know." Armed with arrows and spears, backpacks filled with food and water containers, they set off. They climbed several small hills, but no sign of a village. They crossed different dry riverbeds, but no sign of anything. When the sun finally descended, they found themselves near a fairly tall hill and decided to climb it for a better view of a village. This hill was called Pan Dushi or Orcuyo, which today we call Hooiberg.

The next morning, they could clearly see that they have landed on an island, but an unfamiliar one at that. When Corobori went back to where his father was waiting, he told him the news: "Father Arua, you have just discovered an island, but it is not Curacao or Bonaire. Far in the south, we saw the big mountains of our homeland Venezuela, which we could have never seen on the other island. This leads us to believe we are on a new island. But that's not all. When the sun came up, we saw in the distance a glowing plain, which we think may be salt."

The Cacique was pleased to hear of his son's findings. He decided to stay a couple days on the newly-discovered island in search for salt. The next morning they ascended Hooiberg again and stayed to see if they could find nearby smoke, indicating an inhabitant village. But they found nothing. So they went back to their initial arrival settlement, now known as Santo Largo in Savaneta. The next morning they hiked along the Spaans Lagoen near the Mangel Halto Beach and reached the area of Bushiri. There, they boarded their kayaks and heading to what we know now as Malmok, where they found rocks of salt. After a couple days of exploring the island and gathering some salt rocks, they left for Venezuela, where they were reunited with their families.

Throughout the year, they travelled back and forth to Aruba, collecting salt. After a while they settled on the island, generations of families living along the coast. Corobori was the first indigenous inhabitant in our history to explore the entirety of the island.

Arua, after decades as the leader of his tribe, spent his last days on the island. Having reached 80 years old, he called for his family on his death bed. In his hammock, he said: "My children, many years have passed, and I've asked my warrior to bring me back to the island so I can laid to rest. The God of living has given me the gift of life to see my son, grandchildren and great grandchildren. But now he is calling me home. Corobori, my torch is now passed to you. Guide our people, and be the leader you were always meant to become. If one day you leave my island, do not forget that it is also yours. This is my last wish: When I die, bury me in our maize plantation."

And so when the Cacique passed away, his wishes were granted and he was laid to rest in the area we now know as the Paradera Cemetery. Where he used to live, they built the Paradera Church.

And that is the tale of what inspired the Aruba name. In the generations that lived or travelled back and forth to the island, there were many familiar names\*, like Guadiriki, a warrior who was there when the island got discovered and his son, whom he called Huliba; Corobori and his children, Corodori, Camacuri and Turibana, Masiduri; and Malmok, the 13-year-old boy who alerted the Cacique when the Caribes attacked.

Familiar names: all these names are familiar to Arubans, as these are the names of places and plants on the island. □

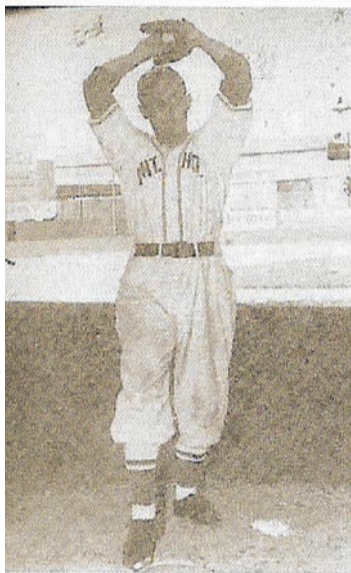
**Source: Un storia di e Indjan Arua (A story of the Indian Arua) by Adolf (Dufi) Kock**

## Short history of the beginnings of baseball in Aruba

**ORANJESTAD —** Baseball was played on the island of Aruba in the 1930's, but only by United States expatriates working for LAGO and living inside the LAGO colony. Jim Bluejacket, the legendary US Indian who had played in two major league teams, worked for LAGO during 14 years and was a key factor in the growth of the popularity of the game in the colony. There is no record of Bluejacket ever playing outside the colony.



Outside the colony, the game of baseball was introduced to Aruba by Venezuelan immigrants and sailors on the Venezuelan fishing boats that used Aruba as their home port. They formed pick-up teams and played games on Sundays on an open field behind what is now the Court of Justice. One of the Venezuelans that comes to mind is Felix Garrido, grandfather of our current Prime-Minister.



In the late 30s the leader of this group was Raúl Aparicio, a cousin of Luis Aparicio who is now enshrined in the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. The Aparicios were evidently very good at sports. Raúl had two brothers who also played baseball, René and Roman. Rosendo, his only brother who did not play baseball became a professional soccer player in the Venezuelan league. Rosendo was nicknamed "Cabeza de oro" (golden head) for a memorable header he scored to win a game for his team.



Interestingly, it was in Aruba that Luis Aparicio played his first game outside of Venezuela. This took place in 1950 when he played shortstop for the school he attended. Later he played for "Cabimas" in a doubleheader of the Venezuelan Western League. These official games of the league were authorized to be played in Aruba by the Professional Baseball Organization of Venezuela. Several others who played in those games have also been enshrined.



Luis Aparicio's father was

the super popular Luis "El Grande" (the great one) after whom the baseball stadium in Maracaibo is named. He and his brother owned the professional baseball teams "Gavilanes" which later became the "Aguilas", and the "Cabimas".

In the early '40s, another group, mostly immigrants from the Dominican Republic also became very active with pickup teams. Some of these remained active in baseball well into the early '50s; as umpires, managers even as players. Among these were Nestor "Pantin" Guerrero who also had a musical band. Perhaps not so coincidentally, many of Pantin's players were also musicians. Luthai Pantophlet who umpired many years was a well-known drummer. Gaston Hazel was a bongo player; José Bryson and the brothers Nicholson, Teddy and Julio, all played several instruments.

In San Nicolas, baseball was played on the grounds next to where the LAGO Sport Park (now Laveist Sport Park) was officially inaugurated in March 1941.

During the WWII years, baseball got a big lift from the influx of Puerto Rican and US soldiers stationed here. As LAGO was playing a very important role in the struggle against Hitler, it was able to get all the sports equipment needed here to allow more people to participate.

In the '40s only the Lago Sports Park organized baseball championship games. The first teams to participate were Artraco, (Aruba Trading Co.), Esso Garage and Botica San Lucas. In 1945 Venezuelan employees of the Lago refinery participated under the name of "Cafenol", a very popular Venezuelan coffee brand. Two other groups of Venezuelan immigrants formed the teams "Cerveceria" (named after the iconic team Cerveceria Caracas), and "Venezuela", although not all members of these teams were Venezuelans. This was also the year that the team



sponsored by Roxy Café started to play as "Dodgers". Dodgers became the dominant baseball powerhouse till the 1950s.

Other teams that entered the baseball scene in the late 1940s: Pepsi Cola (Oranjestad) and St. Thomas Boys (former students of St. Thomas College, Oranjestad). "Baby Ruth" in San Nicolas played initially under the name "Camel" and "Barnes' Ramblers" the only team consisting of Lago Colony players to participate in the Lago Sport Park championships. "Red Rock Cola" was formed in Oranjestad in 1950.

In 1952 the team Pepsi Cola became "Nesbitt's" and had players of seven countries, including two American expats from Lago Colony.

In 1950 a group of prominent members of the Aruba community founded the Amateur Baseball Bond of Aruba (ABBA) to give structure to the management of the sport and became the organizers of official championship games. While maintaining the existing teams in a league that was referred to as A-class, ABBA established a B-class league in which the "Budweiser" and "Braves" played the first years.

By 1952 Aruba became a member of the International Amateur Baseball Association and fielded a team managed by Joe Proterra, (former pitcher of "Barnes' Ramblers"), that would play for the first time ever in the Amateur Baseball World Se-

ries that took place in Havana, Cuba in September. Surprisingly, Aruba won two of its six games and became the darling of the Havana fans. Nell Harms of the Aruban team was named the "Outstanding player of the week" for his performance against Honduras. He allowed just two hits, struck out 15 and hit the only homerun of the game. Joe Cambria, the famous scout for the Washington Senators offered him a contract, but Nel was not interested, but the next year, at the Amateur Baseball World Series in Caracas, Venezuela, Nel and Ruben Phillips did sign and in 1954 they played professional baseball the Georgia-Florida League and the Texas-New Mexico League. They were the first Arubans to play professionally, but not the only ones.

During the games in Havana, contacts were made with the organizers of Little League Baseball in Cuba which eventually resulted in the introduction of Little League in Aruba. Little League of Aruba has been extremely successful: It has produced many players who earned baseball scholarships at universities in the United States, a few who played professionally in the Netherlands and different countries in the Caribbean and five who reached the major leagues: Calvin Maduro, Eugene Kingsale, Radhames Dijkhoff, Sydney Ponson, and Xander Bogaerts one of the brightest stars of Boston Red Sox. □

Written by Mr. Clyde Harms

**CROSSWORD**

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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**Yesterday's answer**

- ACROSS**
- 40 Terra —
  - 1 Bulb units
  - 6 Lesson leader
  - 11 "Adam Bede" author
  - 12 Chilled
  - 13 Bugs bugs him
  - 14 Big books
  - 15 Word on a bill
  - 16 Penny prez
  - 18 Quarter-back Manning
  - 19 Pitching stat
  - 20 Walker, on a sign
  - 21 Charged bit
  - 22 Military alert status
  - 24 Crumb carriers
  - 25 Libya neighbor
  - 27 Like an abyss
  - 29 Jazz bands
  - 32 Mess up
  - 33 Suffer
  - 34 Smelter supply
  - 35 Contrived
  - 36 Frilly wrap
  - 37 Wee bit
  - 38 Stage comment
- DOWN**
- 42 Mail, as payment
  - 43 TV's DeGeneres
  - 44 Grove makeup
  - 45 Canary chow
  - 1 Did garden work
  - 2 Attraction
  - 3 #1 hit for Cyndi Lauper
  - 4 Sock part
  - 5 Attach, in a way
  - 6 Carried
  - 7 One, for Juan
  - 8 #1 hit for Jim Croce
  - 9 Spotted cat
  - 10 Lacquer ingredients
  - 17 Del Toro of "The Usual Suspects"
  - 23 Recipe unit
  - 24 Target
  - 26 Comforts
  - 27 Head out
  - 28 Classroom need
  - 30 Gave addresses
  - 31 Some autos
  - 33 Aids illegally
  - 39 Game cube
  - 41 Bullring cry

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44						45			

AXYDLBAAXR  
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-29

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

BCK IBB KQC WIMBXHCN SW  
TSXH FINK TCIH DC TSXH  
DCNK EXMLC MG KQC GCV  
TCIH. — YCQYCK YXHIK  
MBLIG

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: BIRDS SING AFTER A STORM; WHY SHOULDN'T PEOPLE FEEL AS FREE TO DELIGHT IN WHATEVER SUNLIGHT REMAINS TO THEM? — ROSE KENNEDY

# How to pay for promising medications like Ozempic

By **RONITA CHOUDHURI-WADE** of NerdWallet

Steve Haines always loved to go for walks, but exercise had become a nightmare when he was 380 pounds and diabetic. The 49-year-old from Champaign, Illinois, says he would get ulcers on his feet after long walks.

About six years ago, Haines' doctor prescribed Ozempic, a medication approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat diabetes that also helps with weight loss. Haines lost weight and began to feel more active. Now, at 220 pounds and with his diabetes under control, he gets out of the house a lot.

"I sometimes walk 10 to 15 miles in a day," says Haines. Haines is one of many Americans who live with diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, around 1 in 10 Americans have diabetes, and the vast majority have Type 2, a condition in which the body can't control the amount of sugar in the blood.

Ozempic, generically known as semaglutide, can be a lifeline for many. Semaglutide stimulates insulin secretion and controls blood sugar, which helps manage Type 2 diabetes. The medication also slows digestion and sends signals to the brain that the stomach is full, which can lead to weight loss.

Prescriptions in the U.S. for semaglutide medications like Ozempic increased 300% from 2020 to 2022, despite a high price tag. Depending on factors like the dosage and your phar-



This photo combo provided by the FDA shows an authentic Ozempic needle, left and a counterfeit needle, right.

Associated Press

macy, Ozempic can cost over \$11,000 annually. Insurance provides coverage for some patients, but others must find alternative ways to pay, through savings or assistance programs or borrowing.

**UNDERSTANDING INSURANCE COVERAGE**

Most health insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, cover at least some of the cost of semaglutide medication when it's prescribed to treat Type 2 diabetes. However, coverage can vary depending on an individual's plan and state requirements.

Alvin Carlos, a certified financial planner based in Washington, D.C., suggests calling your insurance provider to ask if your plan covers drugs like Ozempic and what the out-of-pocket costs may be.

When choosing insurance, a low-deductible plan can be better for expected costs such as ongoing prescriptions, says Carlos. A health savings account or flexible savings account, which use pre-tax income to pay for health expenses, can also mitigate out-of-pocket costs.

Those who don't have in-

surance that covers Ozempic for diabetes, or are seeking the drug for weight management and other non-diabetic reasons, will likely have to find alternative ways to pay for the medication.

**EXPLORING PAYMENT OPTIONS**

Hillary Filstrup, 37, a customer success manager in Tulsa, tried to get Ozempic to manage her weight after being diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome and developing insulin resistance. However, her insurance wouldn't cover the medication since her condition wasn't diabetes-related. Filstrup opted to pay out of pocket for a semaglutide medication from a compounding pharmacy.

For those like Filstrup with high out-of-pocket costs or no insurance coverage for Ozempic, there are ways to help pay for the medication.

**MANUFACTURERS' SAVINGS PROGRAMS**

Pharmaceutical companies often offer savings cards to reduce out-of-pocket costs for eligible patients. Novo Nordisk, the manufacturer of Ozempic, provides a savings card that can significantly lower the cost for up to three months for qualifying patients with private or commercial insurance.

**PATIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

Patient assistance programs are designed to help uninsured patients who cannot afford their medications. □

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Price : \$ 12 K each  
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**Divi Village**  
Eagle beach  
Studio WK # 01 room # 8201  
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## For a new generation of indie rock acts, country music is king

By **MARIA SHERMAN**  
AP Music Writer

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Singer-songwriter Mitski's "My Love Mine All Mine," plays out like a whispered dirge. The song is gothic lounge music for a listener who only has about two minutes to have their heart broken — a silky soft slow burn stacked with a choir, organ, bass and most critically, pedal steel guitar, the kind favored by country and western purists.

In no way does that description scream "mainstream hit," and yet, for 12 weeks, it has been on the Billboard Hot 100, an unusual metric of success for a wholly independent artist. And for 10 weeks, her indie rock-meets-chamber pop-meets-country held the No. 1 position on Billboard's TikTok trending chart.

Mitski is not from the American South, though her discography has long considered small town U.S.A. and she relocated to Nashville a few years ago to mine the geography's humanity. ("Valentine, Texas" from last year's "Laurel Hell" album is an example, but there are many.)

She is, of course, not the first indie artist to explore weeping Americana sounds. Many of the leading acts in contemporary indie rock pull from the South — like Mitski or hail from there, like soloists Angel Olsen and Waxahatchee, or groups like Plains, Wednesday and two-thirds of the Grammy-nominated band boygenius.

Lucinda Williams' "too country for rock 'n' roll, too rock 'n' roll for country" style is a clear predecessor; and every few generations, it seems like a great new band pulls from alt-country's narrative specificity.

### A WORLD INTERESTED IN COUNTRY

Interestingly, indie rock's current adoption of country comes at a time of increased global interest in country music. According to the Midyear Music Report for data and analytics platform Luminate, country



Mitski performs at the Primavera Sound festival in Sao Paulo on Nov. 5, 2022.

Associated Press

music experienced its biggest streaming week ever this year, a whopping 2.26 billion.

The genre has historically been enjoyed by English-speaking Americans, but their reporting shows growth in non-Anglophonic territories such as Philippines, Indonesia, India, Brazil, Mexico, Germany, and Vietnam.

In March 2023, Spotify launched a new playlist dedicated to the phenomenon of country-influence in indie rock titled "Indie Twang." It's curated by Carla Turi, Spotify's folk and acoustic music editor, who says the playlist was the result of conversations dating back to summer 2022, when they noticed growing "country influence in indie rock," as she calls it. It's a legacy that extends to the late 2010s when country iconography started cropping up in spaces not-traditionally considered country: everything from Lil Nas X's "Old Town Road" to Mitski's 2018 album "Be the Cowboy."

"I also think, through the lockdown we experienced in 2020, listeners sort of emerged craving more

organic-sounding music as a way to connect with others," she continued. The indie twang playlist was born out of all of that, amplified by successful indie artists like Ethel Cain and Plains.

"I'm seeing this space as a kind of movement, rather than a trend," she adds. "The sound will always have its peaks and valleys. I do think that the fanbase, overall, continues to grow. I think that this sort of surge of Americana and singer-songwriter music here in the States has shifted listening habits across the entire country."

### AN ALTERNATIVE STATE OF MIND

In 2023, these indie artists offer an alternative to the pop-country acts dominating mainstream charts like Morgan Wallen, Luke Combs, and Jason Aldean. The movement is led by female performers, for one, and artists who don't immediately fit into a traditional genre format.

They also offer an alternative to traditional images of indie rock: instead of shying away from their geographic identities like moving to New York and smoothing out to "y'all's"

and "ma'ams" from their speech and music they're embracing them. Banjos and lap steel abound. Songs about God, rural roads, trucks, guns, humidity, and crickets do, too.

Like Turi, Jess Williamson of Plains sees the connection to country music from a more traditional indie rock audience as a post-COVID-19 lockdown revelation. "We saw people leaving cities, moving to smaller towns and out to the country.

We saw people in cities baking bread, starting herb gardens, craving something simple, nostalgic, and that feels good," she said.

"On tour, we covered 'Goodbye Earl' by the Chicks, everyone is singing along, and that's the least cool s I can imagine. People are through being cool and are embracing who we are and what we really like.

And for a lot of people, that's country music." She says she had to leave the South in order to return to it and fully appreciate her love for both it and country music, the way "Texans leave and then immediately get a tattoo of the state

of Texas," she says, laughing.

### KEEPING IT CLOSE TO HOME

Karly Hartzman, frontperson of the Asheville band Wednesday, has never left North Carolina. "I think where we live is inseparable from our music at this point. Of course, we are influenced by country music, but country music sounds and feels the way it does because of the environment it's made in. A great country song feels like where it's from," she says.

Wednesday's 2023 full-length "Rat Saw God" made AP's best albums of the year list for its alt-country rock sensibility, where pulling the listener into the quiet parts of a Carolinas hometown is as much a part of the sonic fabric as lap steel or guitar fuzz or a poetic line sung out of key. Hartzmann adds that the complications of living in the South are "the stereotypes ... which are founded of course. The politics, the racism, and the inequity," she says.

"I'm strongly against leaving this place 'cause I disagree with the politics of those in power, though. It's invigorating cause I feel empowered to fight against that (expletive), especially for those who are unable to do that themselves here."

She says the South is her "favorite place on Earth" beyond its influential music but the appeal to stick around and create there is economic, too, which may have an impact on indie artists pulling from country sounds.

"I think affordability is a big factor for people trying to make it from their hometowns now instead of moving to big cities," she says. "The internet makes that possible, obviously."

It also means, for listeners on an Indie Twang playlist, or those at a rock club in a major city or a honky tonk in a small town, new approaches to familiar Southern sounds are more accessible than ever before. □

## Mikaela Shiffrin masters tough course conditions at women's World Cup GS for career win 92

**LIENZ, Austria (AP)** — When Mikaela Shiffrin can coast through the second run and still win the race, her rivals know the American has rediscovered her best skiing in giant slalom.

Seeking her first win of the season in the discipline, Shiffrin held on to a big first-run lead to triumph in a women's World Cup GS amid tough course conditions Thursday.

It was Shiffrin's 22nd career win in GS and 92nd overall — both are World Cup records.

"It's really amazing to have some good training days last week, and come here and show some of my top skiing now," Shiffrin said. "For sure, I managed the second run a little bit more, but it felt like good skiing."

Shiffrin lost most of her first-leg advantage as she skied a rather conservative final run, posting only the 17th fastest time. But it was enough to beat Federica Brignone by 0.38 seconds, a result that sent the Italian to the top of the discipline standings.

Sara Hector, the Olympic GS champion from Sweden, dropped from second after the opening run to third, trailing Shiffrin by 0.45. "The second run was great skiing with a little bit more space," said Shiffrin, who



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin celebrates on the podium after winning an alpine ski, women's World Cup giant slalom race, in Lienz, Austria, Thursday, Dec. 28, 2023.

Associated Press

lost 1.25 seconds on Brignone in that final run. "Federica, a few more gates and she would have probably taken it. So, that's the next thing to learn for the coming races: you have to push in the second run."

The American is third in the discipline standings, 80 points behind leader Brignone and 45 behind Lara Gut-Behrami. The Swiss skier finished sixth Thursday.

"I was like, now I want to win it but I also really don't want to mess it up, that would be so disappointing. So, it

was a little back and forth in my thoughts," Shiffrin said about trying to maintain her first-run lead. "Every (GS) race, I feel more comfortable and I think I have a really good focus with my skiing that can be simple. I can hopefully repeat it more and more races, so I'm super happy with the progress."

Last season, Shiffrin dominated women's giant slalom by winning seven of the 10 events, but that run of victories only started in the last race of December,

too — at another Austrian resort, Semmering.

"My results in GS this year so far have been better by far from what my GS results were last year at this time. When you miss a win for so long in the season, it's easy to be like: I'm doing things wrong," Shiffrin said. "But the season is a marathon, not a sprint."

Shiffrin positioned herself for the victory with a dominant first run, earning her an advantage of 0.63 seconds over Hector and 1.63 over Brignone.

"When I came through the finish, I didn't expect it would be this much ahead, so I'm really happy with that. I'm happy with the skiing, I felt very strong, but I think, maybe, it's one of those runs, it doesn't happen that often," Shiffrin said after the first run.

The American found the right balance between control and attack on the Schlossberg course, where a variation of grippy snow and icy spots caused problems for many racers.

"I know from the experience that you have to be really aggressive on this hill, but it's quite challenging with the darkness and quite a lot of terrain," said Shiffrin, who also won the GS in the Austrian Dolomites in 2019.

Four years ago, Shiffrin also won a slalom on the same hill the following day. A slalom is scheduled for Friday. The first run was delayed for 12 minutes after one of the forerunners, who test the course before the first racer starts, crashed and needed medical attention for an apparent right arm injury.

The first starter, former World Cup GS champion Marta Bassino, also slid off the course and into the safety netting, causing another delay. The Italian seemed unhurt. □

## Julius Peppers and Antonio Gates headline 15 player finalists for Pro Football Hall of Fame

By **JOSH DUBOW**  
AP Pro Football Writer

First-time candidates Julius Peppers and Antonio Gates joined nine returning finalists who advanced to the final stage of voting for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's class of 2024.

Peppers and Gates were announced Wednesday as finalists in their first year of eligibility. They will be joined on the 15-player ballot by five-time finalist receivers Torry Holt and Reggie Wayne.

Seven other players returned as finalists with Pat-

rick Willis, Andre Johnson, Dwight Freeney, Jared Allen, Willie Anderson, Darren Woodson and Devin Hester all getting back to this step. Defensive backs Eric Allen and Rodney Harrison, running back Fred Taylor and offensive lineman Jahri Evans made it to this stage for the first time after previously being semifinalists.

The 15 finalists will be trimmed to 10 and then five during the selection meeting early next year. The final five candidates will need to get 80% of the votes from the panel to get into the

Hall.

Four finalists previously announced are Buddy Parker in the coaching category, and Randy Gradishar, Steve McMichael and Art Powell in the senior category. They also will get in if they get support from at least 80% of voters.

The class of 2024 will be announced at the NFL Honors show on Feb. 8 in Las Vegas, when The Associated Press' season awards for 2023 will also be announced.

Peppers and Gates were both college basketball players before finding their



Carolina Panthers' Julius Peppers looks on from the sidelines during the first half of an NFL football game against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers in Charlotte, N.C., Dec. 24, 2017.

Associated Press

greatest success in football. Peppers was one of the league's most dominant linemen after being picked

second overall by Carolina in 2002 following a two-sport career in college at North Carolina. □

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## Yoshinobu Yamamoto joins the Los Angeles Dodgers, vows to compete for championships alongside Ohtani



Yoshinobu Yamamoto wears his jersey during his introduction as a new member of the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball team Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

By **GREG BEACHAM**  
AP Sports Writer

**LOS ANGELES (AP)** — Just over six years after Yoshinobu Yamamoto watched a play-off game from the raucous

Dodger Stadium stands and decided he absolutely had to play in the major leagues one day, the right-hander pulled on his white No. 18 jersey and a blue cap in the center field

pavilion. The consensus best pitcher outside North America reached one of his goals Wednesday, joining the Dodgers on a 12-year contract that's reportedly the largest and longest ever guaranteed to a major league pitcher.

But the 25-year-old ace of Japan's top league won't be satisfied without many chances to experience the Los Angeles playoff atmosphere he absorbed as a teenager watching Kenta Maeda on the mound at Chavez Ravine in 2017.

While he plays alongside Shohei Ohtani with his star-studded new club, Yamamoto also intends to inspire any dreaming youngsters in the Dodger Stadium stands.

"From today moving forward, I promise to all the fans of LA that I will focus my everything to become a better player, and to become a world champion as a member of the Dodgers," Yamamoto said through his interpreter. "I will stop simply admiring the players that I have looked up to, but rather strive to become the player that others want to become." Yamamoto has been Japan's most dominant pitcher over the past few seasons, and he was coveted by teams across the majors after he elected to leave the Orix Buffaloes this offseason.

The big-budget, pitching-poor Dodgers landed Yamamoto to cap their prolific winter spending spree after signing two-way AL MVP

Ohtani to a \$700 million contract and inking right-hander Tyler Glasnow to a \$136.5 million, five-year deal after his acquisition from Tampa Bay. "This has been a monumental offseason for all of us," manager Dave Roberts said. "It's a privilege to be here, but I don't think the expectations have changed. The roster has been bolstered with some good young players, but our goal is always to compete for championships."

The Dodgers have big expectations for Yamamoto, a 5-foot-10 right-hander with the potential to become a major league ace after a stellar start to his career in Japan. The Dodgers didn't disclose the value of the deal, but several media reports have tagged it at \$325 million. □

## NBA approves sale of Dallas Mavericks to families that run Las Vegas Sands casino company

By **SCHUYLER DIXON**  
AP Sports Writer

**DALLAS (AP)** — The NBA on Wednesday approved the sale of controlling interest of the Dallas Mavericks from Mark Cuban to the families that run the Las Vegas Sands casino company.

The deal was approved just shy of a month since the families of Miriam Adelson and Sivan and Patrick Dumont announced their intention to buy the club. The purchase is in the valuation range of \$3.5 billion.

Patrick Dumont, Adelson's son-in-law and president and chief operating officer of the Las Vegas Sands company, will serve as Mavericks governor. Adelson is the widow of casino magnate Sheldon Adelson. Cuban is expected to maintain control of basketball operations, and there's

no indication the club will leave Dallas.

Cuban has said he wanted to partner with Las Vegas Sands with a long-range plan of building an arena in downtown Dallas that also would include a hotel and

casino. Gambling isn't legal in Texas, and efforts to legalize it face steep odds. Still, Miriam Adelson has made no secret of her push to bring casino gambling to the Lone Star State.



Dallas Mavericks owner Marc Cuban on the sidelines during the first half of an NBA basketball game against the Los Angeles Lakers in Dallas, Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2023.

Associated Press

She pumped more than \$2 million last year into a political action committee, called Texas Sands, which donated lavishly to state legislators and swarmed the GOP-controlled Capitol with lobbyists. She gave an additional \$1 million separately to Republican Gov. Greg Abbott.

But the spending blitz failed to deliver a breakthrough this year in the Texas Legislature, where resistance to legalizing casinos runs deep.

Texas already has a billionaire NBA owner who is a casino operator, Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta, who also supports bringing casinos to his home state but has watched lawmakers sink the idea year after year.

News of the sale of the Mavs broke last month,

hours after Las Vegas Sands announced that Adelson was selling \$2 billion of her shares to buy an unspecified professional sports team.

It remains to be seen how the sale will affect Cuban's place in the spotlight.

While the 65-year-old likely will continue to make basketball decisions, the sale comes as he is stepping away from the popular business TV reality show "Shark Tank" after a 16th season next year.

Cuban was a highly visible owner almost from the day he bought the team in 2000.

He never hesitated to speak his mind, for many years meeting with reporters while he worked on an exercise machine before most home games. □